

## TESTIMONY OF SMOKEJUMPER FOREMAN DODGE

GUSTAFSON: Mr. Dodge is now know to all of us. There is no need to further introduce him here. He has been on the ground with members of the Board, has discussed in detail the actions incident to this operation, and the Board members are very familiar with all the details as Dodge related them on the ground. However, for the purpose of the record I would like to have Mr. Dodge relate in his own words the actions from the time they arrived over the fire until he arrived at Meriwether. I will dispense with questions since he has repeated this story and lived so closely with it for so long. Following the conclusion of your verbal statement, Wag, the Board may feel that they want to ask you a few more questions. If this is agreeable procedure, the floor is yours.

DODGE: We arrived over the fire, which was about 60 acres in size, at 3:10 p.m. Jack Nash called my attention upon sighting the fire in Mann Gulch. I took position in the door of the plane to observe the terrain and characteristics of the fire. The first tentative jump spot on top of the ridge between Mann gulch and Meriwether Creek northeast of patrol point was to considered suitable because of its position in the path of the fire. Another spot was picked in the bottom of the gulch in the vicinity of the head of Mann Gulch. I was concerned over this choice for reasons that if any injuries occurred, it would be almost impossible to get the injured person out. I related this to the spotter, who was Earl Cooley, but I also okayed the spot as suitable to jump to, which was about one-half mile north of the fire.

The fire at this time gave indications that its rate of spread would considerably reduce throughout the evening and night. It was approximately 3:50 p.m. when I looked at my watch upon landing in the jump area. I had an extremely hard landing, and Rumsey came down the hill and helped me off with my jump gear, and I remained there until the rest of the jumpers were down. Hellman reported to me that all the men were okay that had jumped and we accounted for 13 other jumpers. Merle Stratton did not jump.

Our cargo was dropped to us from approximately 5:00 p.m. when all the cargo was retrieved and camp established below the jump area. At that time, I could hear someone hollering over on the fire across the canyon. I left Hellman with the crew to pick up some subsistence and water before starting down the canyon, and left instructions for him to follow me over to the far side of the canyon with the crew. I contacted Harrison, the prevention guard, up on the head of the fire and brought him back to join our crew,

and told Hellman that he should take the crew and return to the northwest side of Mann Gulch and start toward the river grading out of the canyon as he went. Harrison and I returned to our camp area, from where I could see that the fire had started to boil up, and I figured it was necessary to rejoin my crew and try and get out of the canyon as soon as possible.

I caught up with the crew about 5:40 p.m., and had Hellman stop and see that all the crew was together and to remain on the end of the group. We continued down the canyon for approximately five minutes of travel before I could see that the fire had crossed Mann Gulch and was coming up the ridge toward us. I then reversed our direction and started to return to the north, up the northwest side of Mann Gulch, climbing as we went. After traveling approximately 1,000 feet to 1,500 feet, I instructed the crew to drop all heavy equipment. (I did not know until later that they had discarded shovels and pulaskis.) After returning to approximately above our camp area to the west of Mann Gulch, the fire was too close, in my estimation, to continue farther. At this point, I stopped the crew and explained to those nearest me (at least 8 men) that we would have to burn off a section of the light fuel and get into the inside in order to make it through. In my opinion, all my men were still with me or very close and no stampeding was occurring.

After setting a clump of bunch grass on fire, I made an attempt to start another, but the match had gone out and upon looking up, I had an area of 100 feet square that was ablaze. I told the men nearest to me that we would wait a few seconds to give it a chance to burn out inside, and then we would cross through the flames into the burned area, where we could make a good stand and our chances of survival were more than even.

Upon walking around to the north side of the fire I started as an avenue of escape, I heard someone comment with these words, "To hell with this, I am getting out of here!" and for all my hollering, I could not direct anyone into the burned area. I then walked through the flame towards the head of the fire into the inside and continued to holler at everyone who went by, but all failed to heed my instructions; and within seconds after the last man had passed, the main fire hit the area that I was in. This lasted approximately five minutes, and I was able to sit up within the burned area and look at my watch, which indicated 6:10 p.m. At that time, I heard someone holler to the east of me. Upon investigation, I found Sylvia approximately 100 feet below and 150 or 200 feet to the east of my location. He was badly burned, and I moved him to the shelter of a large rock and made him as comfortable as possible by removing his shoes, clearing an area of rocks, and retrieving his canteen. then I told him I would start out for some help. Upon reaching the top of the ridge and starting down the other side, I met Sallee and he told me that they had